

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers

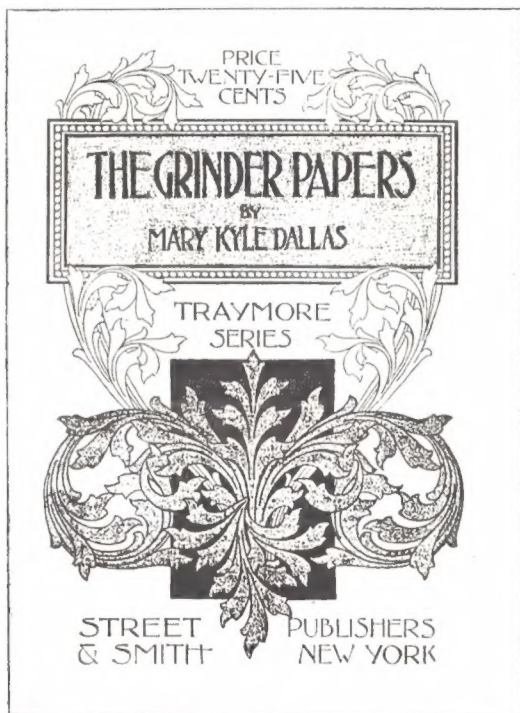
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CONFLICTS ALONG THE RIO GRANDE IN BEADLE DIME NOVELS

By James L. Evans



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CONFLICTS ALONG THE RIO GRANDE IN BEADLE DIME NOVELS*

By James L. Evans

Eastern readers of the late 1800s knew very little about the area along the Rio Grande River, but they had heard that soldiers and ranchers in the frontier state of Texas were struggling against many problems, including weather conditions, barren land, isolation, and Indians and Mexicans. And the Rio Grande River was the international boundary that separated Texas from the land of Mexican bandits who frequently crossed the river on horseback, looted and destroyed on the American side, and then returned with their booty to Mexico. In this locale of the Rio Grande, the dime novelist could create all kinds of adventurous episodes. Quite logically it became the setting for many dime novels.

This article will discuss three Beadle dime novels that take place along the Rio Grande. They are EVIL EYE, KING OF THE CATTLE THIEVES; OR, THE VULTURES OF THE RIO GRANDE (1/2DL-185); SIMPLE SIM, THE BRONCHO BUSTER, OR, PLAYING THE FOOL FOR BIG STAKES; A ROMANCE OF THE RIO GRANDE RANCHES (1/2DL-699); and KIT CARSON, JR., THE CRACKSHOT OF THE WEST (DL-3). These three illustrate that dime novelists used the Rio Grande in a variety of ways.

EVIL EYE, KING OF THE CATTLE THIEVES is by Frank Dumont. He was never near the Rio Grande, but he uses the uncertainty of life along the Texas/Mexico border and the continual crossing and recrossing of the river, especially by bandits, as the major topics of the dime novel. Basically the story is about three men competing for the daughter of a large ranch owner. These men are a U. S. Army Lieutenant, an evil-eyed bandit who is almost phantomlike, and a deserter from the U. S. Army who aids the bandits. The girl is captured and taken into Mexico. Three of the most common words in the story are *cutthroats*, *cattle thieves*, and *bandits*. All of the events occur near the river and happen because of the international situation created by the river. Though there are numerous characters and the plot is involved even for a dime novel, the river is more important than any of the characters.

The entire novel is more or less a series of accounts of good guys and bad guys continually chasing someone or being chased across the Rio Grande River. From the first sentence which begins with "The moon had just silvered the water of the Rio Grande river..." (page 2) till the end, the incidents of the plot are interwoven with reminders that Mexican cattle thieves came into Texas, stole, and fled back to Mexico where the thieves were safe because they were in partnership with Mexican bandit leaders and the Mexican law.

The river is a vital factor in the accounts of the thefts, of the victims' attempts to retrieve their stolen goods, and of the safety and lives of the good characters and the rancher's daughter.

The second paragraph of the story begins with: "A person stood on the Mexican side of the river..." (page 2). He is alone. Seeing a mass of oncoming cattle, he thinks aloud for the readers to know: "Cattle thieves...just returning from a successful raid and crossing back into Mexico. Villains! Once upon this side of the river they know they are safe from pursuit" (page 2). The author then announces that "The rascals

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were driving the cattle into the shallow stream and were even now midway across the river" (page 2). Half the men were urging the cattle across the river; half were acting as a barrier between the heard and any owners who might come in pursuit. But, the author adds, "the boundary line had been reached and the asylum offered by Mexican supremacy prevented the pursuers from setting foot upon Mexican soil" (page 2). Similar scenes and comments appear throughout the story.

In scenes on the U. S. side, focus is on the bad guys who are there for some evil purpose—to steal cattle, to steal mustangs, or to kidnap the rancher's daughter Winona. In scenes on the Mexican side, emphasis is on how easy the bad guys evade the law and how cruel they are to Americans there. The author gives detailed accounts of some raids by Evil Eye, and he gives summary accounts of other raids by him. On the U. S. side, human life is ordinarily safe, but property is not. Across the river not even life is safe for Americans. But U. S. citizens repeatedly violate both U. S. and Mexican law by going into Mexico and risking their lives in attempts to rescue their goods.

Both the author and the characters resent the role of the U. S. and Mexican governments concerning the border. Of course, neither country allows Texans to invade Mexico to steal back their property, and the author's expository comments frequently reveal his resentment about this law, but American characters go into Mexico anyway. The author frequently makes such comments as "It is a well known fact that the border is in a continual state of agitation caused by the incursions of wandering bands ...These scoundrels penetrate into the border counties of Texas, drive large herds of horses and cattle across the Rio Grande into Mexico and there dispose of the animals for good round sums....The rascally Mexican alcaides are in league with the robbers and wink at their crimes and share in their plunder" (page 2).

On the last page of the story, the commander of the army fort tells the wealthy rancher: "If the Government will only allow me to cross the river in pursuit of these brigands I'll warrant they won't repeat their raid in a hurry....They know that we can't violate their territory by pursuing them on Mexican soil....These dastardly Greasers fully believe that we Americans are *afraid* of them!...Heaven help them if ever war is declared between that infernal land and the States!...I fully believe the Lone Star State would furnish all the volunteers [needed] for such a war" (page 11). The rancher's daughter Winona is captured in her Texas home, and three sentences later the author tells us that "the cattle-thieves and their captive were speeding toward the Rio Grande" (page 4).

We are aware of the thefts and evils of the many Mexican bandits, who are nameless parts of a mass group, but the author does not attribute gruesome deeds of brutality to them. Evil Eye, who is an American that is leading Mexican bandits, does burn out the eyes of his victims. When talking to the U. S. Army Lieutenant in Mexico, Evil Eye says: "You're one of the hounds that follow us whenever we choose to cross the Rio Grande to borrow a few head of Texas cattle" (page 3). Evil Eye then orders a Mexican helper to "Seize that red hot iron!...Drag out that American! Burn out his eyes! Burn deep into the sockets! 'Tis the brand of Evil Eye" (page 3). This torture is typical of the mistreatment that good Americans fear from the bad American on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande.

The villainous American who had deserted the U. S. Army and joined the Mexican thieves knows that once he and the Lieutenant are in Mexico, he has the upper hand. The deserter says: "If we meet upon *that* side of the river we will balance accounts" (page 5), and pages later he tells the Lieutenant: "We are on Mexican soil and I have you in my grasp" (page 9).

But all ends happily: The rancher's daughter escapes; the Fourth Cavalry has been able to conceal its invasion of Mexico and thus will not have problems with Washington; Evil Eye is killed and his forces scattered; the army deserter is killed by the Lieutenant; the straggling Mexican bandits are on the Mexican side without a leader; and the good guys are north of the Rio Grande preparing for the marriage of the Lieutenant and the rancher's daughter. Everybody seems to be where he belongs, and since there is no further reason for anybody to chase anybody else across the river, the author ends the story.

SIMPLE SIM, THE BRONCHO BUSTER is by Lieutenant A. K. Sims, a pseudonym of John H. Whitson for twenty stories in the Dime Library series and twenty-seven in the Half-Dime Library series. He uses settings all over the Far West, but there is no evidence in biographical accounts that he had ever been in those regions. A careful study of SIMPLE SIM reveals no genuine knowledge of South Texas or the Rio Grande area.

The principal character is Simon, who had appeared at a South Texas ranch and instantly earned the name Simple Sim because only a simple person would take such risks on wild bronchos as he does. Thousands of words in the early part of the story are used to illustrate Sim's incredible skill as a broncho buster and to make clear to the reader which characters are the good guys and which are the bad guys. Then the cowboys are awakened one night by "Wild bellowings and a confused trampling of hoofs" (page 4); and they know that the cattle they had rounded up for branding are being stamped by either Comanches or Mexicans. In expository material the author explains that there had recently been frequent raids and that these raids will surely continue. The author then adds: "The location was peculiarly favorable to the raiders. Just across the river lay the untrodden expanses of Northern Mexico, heaped with hills, gulled with ravines, and covered with dense stretches of chaparral and mesquite, which offered the securest of hiding-places. And, besides, the logic of events seemed to indicate that the Mexican authorities were in a manner allied with the outlaws" (page 5). Most of the remainder of the novel deals with the problems of attempting to rescue the cattle, the mustangs, and the rancher's daughter from the bandits and bring them back from Mexico. The Mexican authorities are identified as corrupt; but unlike many dime novels, this one does not dwell on the absurdity of Mexican and U. S. authorities forbidding Americans to go into Mexico to retrieve their stolen property. There is no reference to the U. S. law and only one reference to the Mexican law forbidding U. S. entry. The American characters go into Mexico any time they choose without considering the law. Whenever the American men are in Mexico, they are in constant danger of the bandits (some of whom are in league with the employees of an evil American rancher who is also a Texas county sheriff). While the bad men are on the American side, they are usually leading American-owned livestock toward the Rio Grande and the good guys are in pursuit trying to retrieve the animals before they are crossed into Mexico. In Mexico the good men are usually running back toward the river to escape the danger of assassins; sometimes they are escorting rescued mustangs. And the bad men are in pursuit to attack the good men before they get back to the U. S. side.

The river is the boundary between safety and danger. On the American side, the good men are safe; in Mexico, they are the victims of all kinds of things—an unfriendly terrain, barren and parched deserts, vegetation that conceals assassins, intense heat, insects, and bandits.

In this dime novel much attention is given to the Mexican terrain which differs greatly from the terrain across the river on the U. S.

side. On numerous occasions the author points out the difficulty of getting back animals from Mexico because of the terrain. For example, when one group of Texans enters Mexico, the author states that the men had been able to track the stolen animals to the brink of the water on the Texan side, but "There the trail was lost, for the banks on the Mexican side were so firm and rocky they retained no hoof-prints" (page 5). Such things as lizards basking on the rocks, centipedes, and rocky gorges are often mentioned. The author repeatedly describes the rock cliffs that make it difficult for Americans unfamiliar with the terrain to find a place to cross, either as individuals returning from Mexico or as escorts of recaptured livestock.

But Simple Sim, the careless but skilled broncho buster, is always the savior. When Sim is ready to enter Mexico on his first trip there, the ranch foreman looks at the endless chaparral and expresses the typical Texan's view by saying that he never feels safe in a place like that "especially on that side of the river" (page 5). But Simple Sim is not afraid; as the author says, "American and Mexican soil were alike to him" (page 5). And in Mexico, as in the U.S., Simple Sim proves his statement that "I kin break anything what runs on four legs" (page 6).

Simple Sim is only a low-paid low-status broncho buster, and a simple one at that. In the foreign land of Mexico, however, he handles not only the terrain and the bronchos but also the people. Thus, his skills save the other characters and rescue stolen livestock. An Army officer once comments that Greasers are "great fellows for cunning and trickery, but they'll be apt to run at the first smell of burning gunpowder" (page 9). In Mexico, Simple Sim also shows his ability to be cunning. When Sim encountered a group of Mexicans trying to control a group of wild mustangs stolen from an American ranch, he pretended to be naive and agreed to tame one of the animals. He rode it in circles, pretending to be about to fall off; each circle extending farther from the Mexicans, and the mustang gradually led the other animals to follow. Before the Mexicans realized the situation, Sim headed his animal toward the distant hills and eventually across the Rio Grande into Texas with all the other mustangs following.

But in spite of danger in the foreign land, eventually most livestock are retrieved and all good characters are still alive. The author concludes the action of the story with the Texans returning to the U.S. The last sentence of that part states: "Some trouble was had in getting the mustangs across, but it was accomplished in due time, and the little party rested that night on the American side of the River" (page 12). Then in a hasty summary of later events, the rancher's daughter marries the foreman even though there is still danger of raids to the ranches, and the ranch owner is planning to move to another county where his livestock will not be stolen and driven across the Rio Grande.

KIT CARSON, JR., THE CRACK SHOT OF THE WEST is by Samuel Hall, who had actually been a scout and a U.S. soldier in Texas. This dime novel is mostly about frontier scouts who were historical figures, but the details of their exploits are fictitious. The story begins in San Antonio, where men are preparing to go to the Rio Grande area to try to suppress Juan Cortina, "the most successful bandit that ever invaded Texas" (page 2). He and his hundreds of Mexican bandits had been raiding Texas ranches, stealing livestock and creating fear. According to reports, this time Cortina and his men had pillaged and burned the Texas ranches for a hundred miles.

The story has no plot. The scouts, soldiers, volunteers, and others go to the Rio Grande, where they have one encounter after another and

witness repeated incidents of bandit brutality, eventually win that segment of the Cortina wars, and then return to San Antonio.

Sam Hall, who accurately understood the geography of the area, shows that the river itself both separates the U.S. from Mexico and unites the inhabited area on one side of the river with that on the other. On both the U.S. and Mexican sides, the communities along the river are segregated from the remainder of their country by miles of uninhabited and barren land.

Cortina reigned supreme on both sides of the river. The author never justifies the deeds of the innumerable Mexican bandits, but he often does place the blame entirely on Cortina. He once says that Cortina is an outlaw on both sides of the river and is so feared by even his own followers that they are afraid to betray him. Thus, the isolated American settlers along the river are in constant danger of Cortina and his forces. Men from San Antonio are eager to fight this Mexican bandit. They want to help the Americans living near the river; they want to show their Texas pride and power; they want to get even with the bandit who has invaded Texas. While preparing for an attack, Commander Rip Ford says: "We will drive the Greasy cutthroats and thieves into the river, and if they come out safe on the Mexican side, why, we'll follow them on their own ground" (page 2).

The author not only regards the river both as a cord that unites the inhabited area of Americans on the north with the inhabited area of Mexicans on the south, but he also declares the river to be the boundary that separates the good men from the bad men. Nevertheless, the author does not have the racial and ethnic prejudices many men of the time did. In contrast to authors who fill their Texas scenes with dark-skinned persons considered to be of an inferior Mexican race, Hall displays no prejudice against persons of Mexican heritage who live on the U.S. side. Once when he comments in the expository material about the awful Greasers, he adds: "When I say Greasers, I do not mean our Texas Mexicans; they are as good citizens as we have, honest, reliable,..." (page 6). On the other hand, his *Greasers* or *Mexicans* are repeatedly referred to as *cutthroats*, *villains*, and *bandits*; they are extremely brutal, and they are eager to kill all Americans.

One significant thing about this dime novel is that much of it occurs in the river towns of Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Mexico,—two thriving communities that were the actual scenes of much of the historical Cortina's activity. The two towns were really one community, then as now; and the river ferry continually transported both innocent persons and Cortina's men back and forth from one side to the other. Unfortunately, Texan Mexicans living on the Texas side and Cortina's followers from the other side have identical physical features, and thus the bandits mix among the Texas Mexicans without being detected as bandits. The Mexican Americans living in that part of Texas at that time were invariably recent immigrants, but Hall indicates that any Mexican who crossed the river and established residence on the Texas side was instantly an honorable and lawabiding Texan who both hated and feared Cortina and all evil Mexicans. The stereotype idea of "once a Mexican, always a Mexican" does not apply in this story.

All evil deeds in the story are committed by persons from the Mexican side of the river. Hall frequently reminds the reader that the river which ties the U.S. communities to the Mexican communities is also a political boundary and therefore it enables an outlaw to flee the laws of either land. Cortina repeatedly crosses back and forth; the members of his gang sometimes cross into Texas on horseback and sometimes on the

ferry in disguise as innocent men. They steal whatever they wish and of course are safe from U.S. law as soon as they recross into Mexico.

The Texans in the story are distinctly *Texans*, not Americans, even though most were newcomers to the state. They often give yells to show their Texas pride. There is much emphasis on the fact that they hate Cortina because he has often crossed the Rio Grande and "invaded Texas." In many works, both fictitious and supposedly historical ones, the author emphasizes that Cortina has stolen many cattle in Texas; this dime novel does not emphasize specific crimes regarding property, but the fact that *Cortina has invaded Texas* is a major issue. As in many dime novels, this invasion of Texas soil is blamed both on Cortina and on the U.S. and Mexican governments. One character says: "'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange that our sister *Republic* should allow her citizens armed, with malice and hatred in their hearts, to invade the realms of Uncle Sam" (page 14). The character then elaborates on the friendly relationship between Mexico and Washington and the unfriendly one between Mexico and Texas. "You never get a [hand]shake from a Texan," he tells Mexico (page 14).

Very seldom do the Texas scouts in this story go across into Mexico. They consider it a forsaken country — with nothing worth having except the things bandits have stolen from the American side. As one Texan, an Irishman really, says when he looks across the river for the first time, "...an' is that Mexico,...wher' the Grazers ar' after coming frum? 'Pon me soul, it's a h'athen lookin' place..." (page 14).

The Texans usually abide by the laws forbidding them to invade Mexican soil, but many incidents occur right at the Rio Grande itself. Texans shoot from the U.S. riverbank as Mexicans on horseback flee across the river. And once Cortina's exhausted horse could not get a foothold on the Mexican side and sank "while the bandit chief clamored up the bank in safety, amid a shower of balls" (page 20).

To satisfy the craving of some readers for gruesome and violent details and also to reinforce the stereotype of the Mexican bandits, the author often gives vivid accounts of cruelty by the Mexicans. Brutality occurs in action between Texans and Mexicans; also, Texans going from place to place see evidence of previous cruel deeds. At one point the Texan scouts encounter "the swollen, mutilated corpse of a man, covered with blood and clotted gore, the clothing torn in shreds from his mangled form; but this was a sight too common to these men to cause the feelings so plainly stamped upon their faces." And beside him was "his little son, seven years of age, blood oozing, from a stab in the little fellow's temple, from a gash in his breast, and another in his wrist." Soon we read that "the flies had blown the wounds, and maggots were crawling in and out of the stabs in head and breast" (page 11).

During the fighting in the latter part of the story there are numerous accounts of mutilations which the author suggests are typical deeds by the Mexicans from across the Rio Grande. Let us consider one example: "Tied, hand and foot, to the trunks of these trees, are three Texans, stripped naked. A gash extending right and left across their bowels had allowed the intestines to fall, so that they hang to the ground" (page 16). And in a whirlpool in the Rio Grande very near Brownsville, there were some floating logs, with a naked and mutilated corpse tied to each. The logs had been placed there by Cortina's men so that the Texas scouts and the Brownsville residents would witness the horror created by Cortina's men.

After much fighting by Texans and Mexicans, and after the author has used up his quota of words, the story quickly ends. One character thinks of the victory for Texas and says: "This band of Cortina's cutthroats is

broken up, but a thousand more of his men stand ready to serve him at any time against the hated Gringos. In less than a month, mark my words, Cortina will again disgrace the soil of Texas by his presence" (page 24). Then the scouts return to San Antonio and attend the elaborate wedding of one scout who will soon return to the Rio Grande to fight Cortina and his men in another encounter.

A study of numerous other dime novels of this locale would give different details but would reveal that the river itself is a major factor in dime novels showing the conflicts along the Rio Grande.

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FLORENCE LeBLANC — AN APPRECIATION

By Lydia Cushman Schurman

It seems only appropriate that the life of Florence LeBlanc should be celebrated in the pages of *Dime Novel Round-Up*. Those of us who are fortunate enough to have visited the LeBlanc home at 87 School Street, in Fall River, Massachusetts, will always remember Florence's hearty welcome and generous hospitality.

Even in the old days when five of the six children were still home, there was room at the table for dime novel enthusiasts. In addition to preparing sumptuous meals, Florence would regale us with stories about her adventures as the wife of a collector of story papers, dime novels, and series books. One of her favorite tales was about how she had even had to convince her mother that a man who not only read dime novels but also collected them was a perfectly honorable person, no matter what Anthony Comstock had said about dime novel readers.

Over the years Florence accompanied Eddie with gusto to all the conventions and meetings he attended. It never mattered where the meetings were or how far the distance. The exciting part for her was the adventure of going off with Eddie and driving all the way to such places as St. Louis, Missouri, and New Orleans, Louisiana. The best part of the trip, she would say, was having Eddie all to herself on the long drives.

At the American Culture Association meeting in April, 1989, Florence knew her doctor was concerned. "He's seen something he doesn't like," she said. "I'm going home to see what it is."

The news was not good. Then the long struggle began. For Florence and her family there followed eleven months of pain and suffering, eleven months of agony and despair.

Florence died on March 7, 1990.

Hers was a life richly lived and generously shared. Blessed, indeed, are those of us whose lives she touched.

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HARDY BOY NOTES — THE EPIC: REBELS AND MYSTICAL MEN

By John M. Enright

At the beginning of the series, in the dust jacket days when Canadian novelist Leslie McFarlane held the reins as the storyteller, in times of depression and war, in the heyday of the pulp magazines, before they needed television to prop up their sales, before revision and abridgment, Joe and Frank Hardy went all about the region of Bayport, ensnaring smugglers and thieves in the depths of the cliffs along the Shore Road, investigating islands in search of lost friends or stolen stamps, even making a snap decision to jump aboard a train bound for New York City while tailing a kidnapper. On one occasion, they even traveled so far from home as Montana, while they were hunting for hidden gold.

But in 1934 came their first trip out of the country, and it resulted in one of the great outdoor adventures of all time, entitled *THE MARK ON THE DOOR*. It is too bad that the geniuses who run Hollywood didn't film this story, instead of *COTTON FLUB* or *SON OF AN ISHTAR*. Such enthusiasm for the thirteenth entry might seem odd to today's readers, who have only been exposed to the 1967 rewrite, so it may not be out of place to take a brief look first at this pretender to the throne.

"Mark '67" doesn't completely discard the original story but it trims action scenes down to the bare bones and in their place injects irrelevancies. It also drains the McFarlane descriptions from the prose, so that Fenton Hardy is no longer a "celebrated American detective," but rather a "super-sleuth." One wishes the slick magazines would cure themselves of their habit of preceding every profession with *super*: super-lawyers, super-stars, super-models. And 95% of the time, those so described are dolts. In fact, they are quite often . . . super-dolts!

Remember the first-class descriptions of the storms in the McFarlane versions of *THE HOUSE ON THE CLIFF* and *THE MISSING CHUMS*? In "Mark '67," the rewriter seems determined to convince us that he knows everything—except how to write a sentence: "The group gazed down on a solid layer of stratus clouds ... a frightening sight. Towering cumulo-nimbus clouds." One suspects that Shakespeare would have appreciated that touch. Elsewhere, McFarlane's dramatic courtroom scene is simply tossed out the window, and Mr. Hardy merely tells his sons what happened during the trial. This is what Alfred Hitchcock used to complain about: a scriptwriter who would say to him, "Oh, we can cover that scene with a line of dialogue." But again, instead of showing the titular insignia, the writer dumps it on the reader via a "typewritten message." Wonders Frank Hardy: "What mark on the door?" Good question. Mr. McFarlane had Chet Morton lead the brothers deeper into the mystery; the rewriter only has Chet play the fool, on water wings or in a corral used by matadors. Warns Joe: "Watch out for the bull." The reader, too, should heed Joe's warning.

When Fenton Hardy asks his son if he wants to go to Mexico, Joe cries out, "Roger, Dad!" Now, wait a second. No kid in all of history has said anything of the sort to his father. On page 31 of the Wm. Collins edition, Joe says of Mexico: "That's a long way off." On page 32, Joe says: "Mexico isn't so far off." Huh? Was this ghosted by the Man with Two Brains? Whoever he was, he was mighty confused. He didn't know he was writing the Hardy Boys; he thought he was working on Little Orphan Annie. He has both Chet and Joe say: "Leaping lizards."

In short, a lot of dumbbell dialogue about submarines and symbols substitutes for sensational sleuthing on sea and land. Junk books like this might create skimmers, but not readers. For the true adventure of

THE MARK ON THE DOOR, one must visit Professor Carter Nichols, whose "incredible time-traveling apparatus" can transport a person "across the time barrier . . . into . . . the misty past."

Their 1934 odyssey takes Joe and Frank Hardy across Barmet Bay, to a courtroom, to a rooming house, to an airfield, to a boarder town in Texas—all locations suggesting instability, the desire of the unsettled to move on in search of something more, something which will fulfill them. This is not unlike the experience of author Leslie McFarlane. As J. L. DiGaetani has written: "McFarlane has been conditioned to see much of his life as an adventure, complete with heroes, villains, sudden reversals, touches of sentimentality, danger, fun, and excitement... McFarlane was ...able to make a living literally by his wits as a free-lance writer." And just as Leslie McFarlane lived from book to book and kept on the move from city to city and from Canada to America and back again, so too the Hardy brothers (here leaving their own country even as McFarlane left his) lived from case to case and endured an insecure existence: "The bay always was treacherous and subject to sudden squalls."

Both versions open with the brothers out in the *Sleuth*, which is "clipped" by a large craft which roars "across the tossing waste of waters." At the wheel of the other boat: "swarthy" Pedro Vincenzo, who turns out to be connected to the Rio Oil racket of selling worthless stock. Unlike Stratemeyer or Adams or the 19th century dime novels which they raided for scenes and dialogue, Canadian McFarlane goes out of his way not to tar a whole race as worthless. On page 20, he has Detective Fenton Hardy inform his sons: "The oil wells were supposed to be in Mexico and two or three of the directors were from that country. The others were Americans." Chet Morton's father is on the jury trying the Rio fraud and this draws the brothers into another encounter with Vincenzo. If this is contrived, at least it's connected to the story at hand; in the rewrite, Chet's part is irrelevant beyond belief. When crucial Witness Elmer Tremmer disappears from the Rio trial, the Hardy family sets out on "the trail to Texas."

In this location and in its journey and in its portrayal of tyrants and rebels, THE MARK ON THE DOOR has some of the same structure and character traits as RED RIVER, arguably the finest film directed by an American. His fortune gone before the onslaught of crooked carpetbaggers and power-mad Jayhawkers, Thomas Dunson stakes everything on a desperate cattle drive from Texas to Missouri. The difference between Vincenzo and Dunson is that the latter has a conscience in the person of chuckwagon Cook Groot, who informs him more than once: "You was wrong, Mr. Dunson." It is only when these two split up that Dunson goes off to form his band of outlaws.

As they head across the open spaces, both the Dunson group and the Hardy group battle Mexicans and Indians. Juan Marcheta tells the Hardy brothers: "We are going toward the desert... The people of Coahuila call the place the *Llano de los Gigantes*, the desert of giants." (At the end of the dust jacket days, when McFarlane was long gone, volume forty was MYSTERY OF THE DESERT GIANT.) Here Leslie McFarlane demonstrates that his descriptive powers were not limited to storms: "The sky flamed with glorious colors as the sun slowly sank beyond the horizon. Darkness came swiftly, bringing a welcome coolness after the heat of the day... The pink glow of a campfire indicated the location of the oasis as the party rode ahead." Each word carries its own weight. Now contrast Robert L. Pike's addiction to adjectives in chapter seven of REARDON (1970): "Wilkinson lived in a first-floor apartment [in] the gaily painted three-story house... Then...the black gaunt height of the building seemed almost

threatening. Now, in the bright noon sunshine, it looked . . . both safe and homey." At a lunchcounter and in the fog on San Francisco Bay, Pike has his moments, but the rest of the time the reader is wondering: What on earth is *dark* noon sunshine? But the snooty critics let writing like Pike's go while looking down their noses at McFarlane's, which is first rate. Critics don't take McFarlane seriously; McFarlane's readers don't take critics seriously.

There is a mystical air about the Indian, Yaqui, who appears and disappears almost as if by magic. In the same way, in one of RED RIVER'S finest scenes, Matt Garth is walking through the fog after he's tied up Dunson and ridden off with the Dunson heard. Matt hears hoofbeats, turns, pulls his gun, squints into the fog. Slowly a rider materializes. He turns out to be the drover, Buster. Buster gets a load of the gun and says: "You thought it was *him*, didn't you? You thought he had come back."

Vincenzo is beset by "deserters," Dunson by "quitters." Pedro threatens to "brand" his enemies; Tom threatens to "hang" his. In both stories, there is a character (Garth, Tremmer) who puts up with a lot from the tyrant before he draws the line and leads a rebellion against him. In both cases, this change is provoked not merely by some noble opposition to hanging or branding but by a new intelligence: in one case, Tremmer learns that Fenton Hardy is in the vicinity, in the other, Matt Garth believes the rumors that the railroad has now stretched to Abilene, Kansas and determines to head the cattle there.

An epic is born not of length but of depth, and not everybody can produce one. The revolt seems to be the key element which makes a genuine epic and which invests its characters with a power which they could obtain in no other way. Against the backdrop of a P.O.W. camp in Burma, the flashy Lean-Forman-Wilson film, THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI, attempts to travel this same route; the search for the missing witness and the cattle drive have as their substitution the more stationary building of the bridge. As KWAI heads toward what Leslie Halliwell has called "an unforgivably confusing climax," it stumbles over the revolt aspect. In a role intended for the too expensive Cary Grant, William Holden is not part of Alec Guinness's P.O.W. group and so has not arrived at a moral and intellectual crisis but is merely a stock adventure character on a mission improbable. RIVER KWAI got the awards, but it is RED RIVER which delivers the goods.

In THE MARK ON THE DOOR, Leslie McFarlane goes beyond THE MISSING CHUMS approach in which Joe and Frank Hardy simply find the kidnap victims on an ominous island and go about the business of setting them free and fleeing their captors. In DOOR, the brothers locate Elmer Tremmer, but this doesn't prove to be particularly helpful because Tremmer views them as messengers with unpleasant news. Nobody enjoys being told that he has been a fool, so Tremmer punishes the brothers for telling the truth. In the same fashion, Dunson is not grateful that Garth was correct in going to Abilene; he resents being "shown up."

Both RIVER and DOOR are weakened near the end: by Tess Millay's prolix protest and by Pedro Vincenzo's tame surrender. But neither flaw counts for too much.

MARK ends with Frank "wisely" observing: "If Pedro hadn't bumped into us we probably shouldn't have...solved the mystery of the mark on the door." And so, in a remark which seems to echo the relationship between Leslie McFarlane and the Stratemeyer Syndicate, Frank Hardy acknowledges the irony that the Hardy brothers need their enemies to stay in business.

A LETTER FROM GEORGE WALDO BROWNE

For many years William J. Benners worked on a history of dime novels and story papers. It never came to fruition, but he corresponded with many authors and publishers. Some of this material found its way to the collections of Stanley A. Pachon. The following letter is such an item rescued from the auction of Stanley's effects.

3 Mirror, Manchester, N.H., October 20, 1911

Mr. W. J. Benners, Philadelphia, Penn.

Dear Mr. Benners:—It has been over a month since I received your first letter, and I am ashamed of my delay in replying to your courteous favor. The truth is I am the busiest man in seven cities, or at least I succeed in making myself think so, which amounts to the same thing. Now I am going to answer both of your letters at some length.

In the first place I was glad to hear from you. I think we are all susceptible, more or less, to flattery, and it was very pleasing to know there was one who had ever given my work a second thought. I have done enough of it, but not well enough. As I look back upon it now it seems like a dream. I have written probably two hundred serial stories and novels; two hundred historical sketches; over a thousand short stories; and about thirty books, some of these extended works. But forty years covers a long period of work. I am doing now mostly historical work, besides running the magazine, copies of which I have sent, with others to follow

My friend, my work is about all the sketch there is of me. I do send you a clipping used in *The Golden Hours*, the portrait having been cut out. I will send you my photo later. Many thanks for yours. I have placed it in my collection of photographs.

I will tell you the little I know of some of the writers you refer to in your communication. I am not satisfied as to the identity of "Roger Starbuck." I have been told it was one of the pen names of Col. E. Z. C. Judson, "Ned Buntline" and Edward Minturn. I think this is true. Joseph E. Badger, Jr., who wrote so much and wrote it so well for B. & A., lived in Mo., and I believe he is yet living, though he does not seem to have written much after B. & A. closed out. He wrote a boy's book, and a good one, but it did not sell very well. Most of the B. & A. writers stopped with them. I have forgotten about Nat Urner. Think the name was a nom de plume. William Manning is dead—died several years ago. I had a long correspondence with him, and he seemed like a genial fellow, "Old Bill," as he called himself, though he was a young man. I have a photo of him. He went to New York to live, but I am under the impression city life was too much for him. The same fate fell to Edward L. Wheeler. By the way, he came out with his first novel at the same time I did. David Adams was alive then, a noble man. Both of the Adamses were staunch friends of mine, but Victor never liked me, and as he was the editor after the death of David Adams, I did not have very clear sailing there.

Harry St. George was St. George Rathborne, whom I knew well. He was from Chicago, one of the crowd at the head of the Novelist Publishing Company, with Dr. Blakely and the Sibleys, all good fellows. Rathborne was a hard worker, and wrote under a dozen pen names. Albert W. Aiken and George L. Aiken were brothers, the latter an actor. Both lived in New York, the former Victor's star writer, and both are dead. George L. did not write as much as his brother. There were two Anthony P. Morris, father and son. They lived in Baltimore. I have been told the younger was a drinking man; at any rate, he met a sad end. Weldon J. Cobb was an Ohian, and he wrote for *Golden Days* under the name of Donald McKenzie.

I do not know as I have spelled that right. I have his picture. He was a robust man, who thought there was no limit to one's ability to work. The result was he suddenly broke down, but he recuperated in time. I think he is living.

Yes, I wrote and still write under the name of Victor St. Clair. It has carried some of my best boy's stories. I could not give you all of the others if I should try. Some of them were "stock" names, and others wrote under them, too. Culled at random there were Paul Braddon, D. W. Stevens, Roy Rockwood, P. C. Glenwood, Billy the Boxer, Col. Dimon Dana, J. E. Donovan, the last two mine exclusively. I have also written under women's names.

Thanks for your praise of "Japan." I never wrote anything that pleased me more, and it had a good sale. By the way, did you know that was one of a series of seven books? The History and description of China is included in the list. I have written this year "India." Have you ever seen my "St. Lawrence River?" I think I reached high-water mark in my Japan, though China holds it a close second.

That finishes your first letter. Right here I want to say, I am preparing other articles along the lines of the two articles I sent you. I have the portraits already made, but it may be sometime before I can use them. My acquaintance with my brother authors has been rather limited, but I have known quite a number. You will notice that the sketch I inclose of myself was written as if Victor St. Clair was an actual person. I have avoided getting into print.

I have a few Saturday Journals, but they have been sadly clipped. Wish now I had kept a complete file, as I might have done. Didn't you write for them? Your name is very familiar to me.

Shall include Ret Winwood in my next series. Am sorry now I did wait until I had got my material so I could bring it all into a unified article. I am surprised to learn that Charles T. Manners was M. T. Caldor. Have been told she was a woman. So was Philip S. Warne, of the Saturday Journal, though her stories would not indicate it. She was a Missippian. Excuse the spelling—lay it to the writer. Yes, I was in error regarding Dr. J. H. Robinson. I got my information from one who ought to know. Since I have got the picture of Dr. Robinson, which I shall give later. I think I am right about the other name, though his daughter, with whom I have corresponded, does not admit it. Cobb was a favorite of my boyhood reading. Emerson Bennett was another. Corresponded with him at one time. Have his picture also, and the plate made for use.

Edward L. Wheeler died before the novels of Beadle went to the wall, and another, possibly Aiken, went on under his name. E. L. W. was a hard drinker, as many of the authors were. Have you facts of Col. Ingraham, Whitson, C. Dunning Clark, Wm. L. Patten, Frank Finn, T. C. Harbaugh? Certainly, I will help you all I can. As soon as I get a little more leisure than I have now, I will give you additional data. But as far as my own work is concerned there is little to say. I have a dozen books planned to write, some of which must come soon. I began as a boy and expect to "die in the harness."

Well, I think I have written quite enough for this time. You see it is hard to get me started, and it is quite as hard to stop me. That reminds me, though I do not know why it should, that I have a letter to answer to an admirer of my stories who lives in your state. I always intend to reply to all who write me, but I am apt to be slow.

Thanking you again for your kind words, I am,

Most sincerely yours,

George Waldo Browne

STILL MORE NOTES ON THE ALGER BIBLIOGRAPHY

By Victor A. Berch

At the suggestion of Gary Scharnhorst (see *Dime Novel Roundup*, Vol. 58, No. 6, December, 1989, page 89), I have conducted a search through the pages of the *Boston Sunday Globe*, especially for the year 1889, which did provide two more previously published sketches:

1. Jane and Jane Elizabeth, by Caroline F. Preston, May 19, 1889
2. Awkward Jeremiah, by Caroline F. Preston, August 8, 1889

Some other additions to the Alger bibliography are herewith listed:

3. Edgar Ashcroft's Bad Luck, by Horatio Alger, Jr., *Western World*, September 9, 1871
4. Fair Haryard The Ties That Have Bound Us So Long, by Horatio Alger, Jr., *Cambridge Chronicle*, July 3, 1852

There is a very slight discrepancy in this text with that which appeared in ALGER STREET; namely: in line two of the above text the word "childish" is found. In ALGER STREET, the word is "childlike".*

Hopefully, more research will unearth still more additions to the Alger repertoire.

*Note: "childlike" is correct. See: *Newsboy*, Vol. XXV, No. 6, May-June, 1987, page 37, for a reproduction of ORDER OF EXERCISES FOR CLASS DAY AT HARVARD COLLEGE, FRIDAY, JUNE 25, 1852, which is the earliest printing of Alger's 1852 Harvard Ode.

* * * * *

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* * * * *

Floyd Stewart, Star Route, Eden Mills, VT 05653, is very much interested in acquiring a Bertha M. Clay novel titled ONE AGAINST MANY. Anyone with a copy for sale is asked to contact him.

* * * * *

The Library of Congress has issued a card suitable for mailing depicting a colored cover dime novel. Jack Bales picked one up for me. It is the cover of BOWERY BOY LIBRARY, #12, BOWERY BILLY'S RUNABOUT RACE; OR, THE BRIGANDS OF BROOKLYN BRIDGE. I hope it's the start of a number of covers they will be reproducing this way.

OLD SLEUTH'S FREAKY FEMALE DETECTIVES (FROM THE DIME NOVELS)*
SOME PERTINENT CRITICISM

By Victor A. Berch

I'll try to keep these remarks in some sort of order. Between you and me, the introduction of this work is really slipshod scholarship and does not speak too well of its editors.

First off, I personally feel that the editors were very insensitive in applying the term "freaky" to someone in an unusual or unconventional occupation. The term carries a strong pejorative connotation and the editors should have exercised a little more discretion in choosing a word that would describe those females who, at this early period, were engaged in an occupation not usually reserved for women.

I am also at a loss as to how the editors describe Ray Walsh, Dan Webb, and the Russel B. Nye Special Collections Division of the Michigan State University "nationally renowned dime novel experts." Outside of Edward T. LeBlanc, I can locate no literature that any one of them has produced in the field of dime novel research. Could it be that they were in some way connected with the procurement of the texts involved? That would hardly qualify them to be termed as "dime novel experts."

Page 1. The sentence "At the close of the 1980s, America's first popular entertainment medium, the dime novel, is over 130 years old." Was the dime novel America's *first* popular entertainment medium? Perhaps the editors meant *popular reading entertainment medium*. If that is the case, the story papers preceded the dime novel as the popular reading entertainment medium. Such papers as *True Flag*, *Flag of Our Union*, *Yankee Privateer*, *Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper*, *Saturday Evening Post* and others long preceded the dime novel. These story papers provided reading entertainment for the entire family and many of the stories contained therein were later reprinted in booklet form akin to the dime novel.

Page 3. The sentence "*The New Buffalo Bill Weekly*, published by Street and Smith through 1912, can be claimed the last dime novel publication." This statement is incorrect as *The New Buffalo Bill Weekly* ran through 1919.

Page 4. In quoting Philip Durham "Although Beadle and Adams reprinted many English and American authors such as Milton, Byron, Dickens, Cooper and Twain," the editors have taken Durham's statement at face value. Durham seems to have taken a great deal of liberty in classifying the various Beadle enterprises under the broad brush stroke of Beadle and Adams. Milton and Byron were published under the aegis of a subsidiary company, Adams, Victor & Co., while Cooper was published by Irwin P. Beadle after his break with Beadle and Adams.

Page 4. The sentence "Shortly after the introduction of Old Sleuth Street and Smith ... lured Halsey to their offices." Old Sleuth was first introduced in the June 10, 1872, issue of *Fireside Companion* and was written under Halsey's pseudonym, Tony Pastor. Halsey, writing as Judson R. Taylor, later showed up in Street and Smith's *New York Weekly* with his first serial story, "The Young Swordsman of Palmyra," appearing in the November 19, 1877 issue. This was hardly *soon after* the introduction of Old Sleuth. "Judson R. Taylor's" first detective story for the *New York Weekly*, "The Indian Detective; or, A Human Sleuth Hound," appeared almost two years later as a serial beginning September 15, 1879.

Page 4. The sentence "Munro's brother and bitter rival, Norman,

*by Garyn G. Roberts, Gary Hoppenstand, and Ray B. Brown. Bowling Green University Press, Bowling Green, OH, 1990, \$15.95 paper, \$31.95 hard cover.

started the Old Cap Collier Library which was scripted by Irvin S. Cobb and ran for almost 800 numbers." Cobb did not write any of the Old Cap Collier Library; however, he did write "A Plea For Old Cap Collier," an article which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, July 5, 1920. It was a nostalgic look at dime novel reading. The Old Cap Collier Library ran to over 800 numbers. This is most strange, since one of the editors, Gary R. Hoppens, edited THE DIME NOVEL DETECTIVE which gave a complete listing of all the titles in the Old Cap Collier Library.

Page 4. The sentence "In 1897, J. S. Ogilvie Publishing Company of 57 Rose Street, New York, picked up Old Sleuth's character and continued the saga in *Old Sleuth's Own*. New stories were created and this series lasted 146 issues." *Old Sleuth's Own* was first published by the Parlor Car Publishing Co. (a subsidiary of G. Munro), 13 Astor Place, New York, and ran for 131 numbers from April 15, 1894, to January, 1899. J. S. Ogilvie reprinted the stories in the early 1900s (about 1905), but the first 15 numbers were not reprinted. Instead they were added on at the end of Ogilvie's run. The earliest number advertised by Ogilvie was 10, but practically all lists began with 16, thus giving a numbering total for Ogilvie of 146. However, in actuality only 131 numbers were reprinted.

Page 4 & 5. The sentence "Westbrook produced 203 more novels, though many were reprints." This statement is sort of ambiguous. It seems to imply that Westbrook published 203 new novels. Many of the numbers in *Old Sleuth Weekly* were reprints of the *Old Sleuth Library*. There were other series and libraries which carried Old Sleuth stories, among them: Adventure Series (Westbrook); American Detective Series (Westbrook); Calumet Series (G. Munro); Ivers Detective Series (Ivers); Lucky Series (G. Munro); Old Sleuth's Special Detective Series (Parlor Car and Ogilvie); Old Sleuth's Standard Series (Parlor Car and Ogilvie); Seaside Library (G. Munro); Sherlock Holmes Detective Library (Royal; I. & M. Ottenheimer; Regan).

Page 9, footnote 4. The sentence "Philip Durham, editor of POPULAR AMERICAN FICTION ... cites the publication as *Ladies' Companion* on page v of his book." The editors seem to agree with Bleiler, who, in this instance, has erred in thinking that MALAESKA was published in *Woman's Companion*. But Durham is correct in his citation. See PIONEERS OF THE DIME NOVEL AND DETECTIVE FICTION, by Madeline Stern and Paulette Rose, *Antiquarian Bookman Weekly* (March 13, 1989), page 1138, and especially footnote 2. See further THE HOUSE OF BEADIE AND ADAMS, by Professor Albert Johannsen, vol. II, page 262. After all, Ann S. Stephens was the editor of *Ladies' Companion* from 1837 to 1841.

In a way, the editors have performed a great service to scholars of detective literary history for reproducing these scarce novels dealing with female detectives, but they should have put more research into their Introduction. Many of the standard tools for dime novel research were overlooked. *Dime Novel Roundup*, a periodical devoted to the study of dime novels, story papers and other popular literature, does not seem to have been consulted. Mary Noel's VILLAINS GALORE would have been most helpful in explaining the role played by the story papers and the impetus they gave to the rise of the dime novel.

* * * * *

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO DIME NOVEL AND SERIES BOOK COLLECTORS

THOSE DARING DIME NOVELS, Robert Reed. A well illustrated article by an enthusiastic but much misinformed collector, appearing in *Antiques & Collecting*, February, 1990.

"THE GENTLE BOY FROM THE DANGEROUS CLASSES": PEDERASTY, DOMESTICITY, AND CAPITALISM IN HORATIO ALGER, by Michael Moon. Article in *Representations*, Summer, 1987. Mistakenly, I believe, ascribes Alger's sensitive treatment of boys in his stories to the Brewster incident. (Sent by Jack Bales)

"ATTN.: NANCY DREW FANS." Short item in newspaper announcing a reading from Nancy Drew Books at the Much Ado Bookstore, Marblehead, MA. (Sent by John Dinan)

RESEARCH BECOMES ADVENTURE, by Katy Powell. Article in the Fredericksburg, VA, *Free-Lance Star* reviewing Jack Bales's bibliography KENNETH ROBERTS: THE MAN AND HIS WORKS.

* * * * *

LETTER

Read with interest the wartime "rambles" of Peter Walther. Lydia Cushman Schurman's article showing Comstock heartlessly "hunting vice" was enlightening and enjoyable. She was very thorough in showing how harmful Comstock was to his victims. Things have certainly gotten more lenient since Comstock's day.

On November 19, 1989, when the 49ers played Green Bay, Dan Fouts noted that QB Joe Montana, completed 70% of his passes. Announcer Dick Stockton replied; "To say nothing of Frank Merriwell finishes at the end." A tautology, but it shows that Frank is not forgotten.

John M. Enright
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* * * * *

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- #26 Lightfoot, the Scout; or, Tracks on the War Path, by L. Augustus Jones. Fair, shaken \$15

POPULAR SERIES OF FICTION FANCY AND FACT (M. J. Ivers, Pub.)

- #7 Rippard, the Outlaw, by Alouette. VG \$15
#? Justina, the Avenger. A tale of Love and Hate, by Antoinette. VG \$15

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PAPER COVERED GUIDES

- Lee's Guide to Saratoga of the Queen of Spas. Henry Lee, New York, 1885 194 pages. Good \$15

- Walling's Route and City Guides, New York to White Mountains via Connecticut River. Taintor Brothers, New York, 1867. With fold-out map. Fair \$15
- Macoy's Centennial Illustrated How to See New York and Its Environs. Robert McCoy, Pub., 1876, 108 pages. Good \$20
- The Hudson River and Routes from New York to the White and Green Mountains, by Thursty McQuill, 1872. Fair \$15
- The Hudson River by Daylight and Routes to Manchester, Vt., Niagara Falls, Lake George, Sharon, Lebanon and Saratoga Springs, by Thursty McQuill, 1873. Fair \$20
- Philadelphia and Its Environs. J. B. Lippincott, Pub. Fair \$20
- Summer Excursion Routes, Season of 1879 Pennsylvania Railroad. Large size, fold-out map. Good \$25
- Summer Excursion Route, 1887., large size, illustrated. Good \$25
- Miller's New York As It Is with Map, 1863. James Miller New York, Pub. cloth bound, fold out maps, 124 pages. Covers loose \$25
- Kobbe's Jersey Coast and Pines. An Illustrated Guide Book with road maps, by Gustave Kobbe, 1889. Cloth bound. VG \$25
- THE BUNKER HILL SONGSTER. Murphy, Printer & Publisher, undated, ca. 1876 \$15
- THE INFANT'S TOY BOOK OF PRETTY TALES, Embellished with eight neatly colored engravings. Solomon King, Pub., 1831. Good but covers loose \$25
- SPRING HEELED JACK, Aldine Pub. Co., London. 10 x 6 3/4" 24 pages, colored cover, 1904. #s 1 to 4. Good \$5 each

THE ALDINE O'ER LAND AND SEA LIBRARY Aldine Pub. Co.
London. 8 1/2 x 5 1/2" 64 pages. Colored cover.

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ARMY AND NAVY LIBRARY Army & Navy Pub. Co.

- #6 The Signal Gun; or, Hand to Hand, by Captain Edward Park. VG \$10

WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY Frank Tousey, Pub.

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